

EXHIBIT O-7

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1 family, 3 deaths: Couple must pick up pieces — again — after opioids' destruction

THE BALTZES' TRAGEDY IS A CRUSHING CONSEQUENCE OF AN EPIDEMIC THAT IS ENVELOPING NASHVILLE.

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The missing soda bottle caps and the vanishing spoons from the kitchen drawer. The hollow excuses and the irresponsible decisions.

And, the money. Their once responsible daughter was suddenly always short of cash, asking her dad for \$50 or \$100 to pay her phone bill or to get to the next paycheck.

"I believe people when they tell me something.
'Course, with her, I believed it for way too long."

A family of four is gathered in a cemetery. A woman in a dark patterned top and black pants holds the hand of a young girl in a pink dress. A man in a grey button-down shirt and black pants holds a young boy in a colorful patterned shirt and green shorts. They are all looking towards a grave in the foreground, which is marked with a large, vibrant bouquet of white, yellow, and red roses. The background shows other graves and trees under a clear blue sky.

(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

An epidemic hits Nashville

For years, the epicenter of the state's opioid crisis has been northeast Tennessee, devastating small towns and rural communities that dot the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains.

The state has the dubious distinction of having the second highest rate of opioid prescriptions in the nation.

In the past four years, however, the drug epidemic has crept steadily westward, morphing into a heroin-driven public health crisis as opioid prescriptions became more closely regulated. People addicted to opioids turn to heroin, a cheaper and more readily available opioid when medications such as oxycodone got harder to come by. They also turn to fentanyl, a powerful opioid that can be cheaply manufactured in illegal labs and often proves fatal in small amounts.

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Between 2014 and 2016, Nashville's drug overdose rates jumped by more than 71 percent, a sudden spike that has left city health officials, emergency responders and a porous safety net of treatment providers scrambling to catch up.

The city's drug overdose rates have now reached, and in some instances surpassed, rates in rural Appalachia, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Too many knocks at the door

Heather Baltz's death marked the family's most brutal encounter with Nashville's opioid and heroin crisis.

But it was not the only one.

In 2013, they were awakened by a 3 a.m. knock on the door. A Metro police chaplain informed them that Tina Baltz's brother, 47-year-old Paul Shoulders Jr., had been killed in a car accident.

Shoulders was driving on Interstate 40 near Hermitage when his pickup was clipped by Robert "Todd" Harrell, a former bassist for the band 3 Doors Down. Harrell was later convicted of vehicular homicide.

Todd Harrell case: [Ex-3 Doors Down bassist gets prison in deadly crash](#)



Braelyn Hardin reacts as she looks through pictures of her mother at her home in Donelson on March 20, 2018. Heather Baltz died in February at the age of 28 after battling an opioid addiction for years.

(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

(<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2015/12/18/ex-3-doors-down-bassist-gets-prison-deadly-crash/77284292/>)

He was speeding at 101 mph with the opioid oxycodone and the muscle relaxant alprazolam in his system. (Last week, Harrell was arrested again in Mississippi on unrelated drug, gun and domestic violence charges and faces a revocation of his probation in Shoulders' death.)

Then in 2016, a police chaplain came knocking again. This time it was to report the death of Heather's former boyfriend, Ralph Hardin, who lived with the Baltzes and was helping to raise the two children he and Heather shared together.

Hardin, 29, was fatally shot with his own gun in a room at the Red Roof Inn, where — the Baltzes say — he had gone to confront Heather's dealer. Police closed the case concluding Hardin may have accidentally shot himself.

Two days before his death, Hardin had posted pictures of heroin paraphernalia on his Facebook page, promising he would track down whoever had supplied drugs to Heather.

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'She was a happy child. And then this happened.'

It was during Harrell's trial and its aftermath in late 2015 that the Baltzes confronted their daughter.

"She said it was pills," Tina Baltz said. "We told her she needed to get help. She was scared to death. She was worried about what would happen to the kids and losing custody."

One day while the family attended Harrell's trial, Heather leaned over to her mother and whispered that she had bought drugs from the same dealer who had supplied the man who killed her uncle.

For the next two years, Heather was in and out of jail for stealing, followed by three brief stints in rehab. Her parents kicked her out, then welcomed her back in, loaned her a car, then demanded it back.

They formally took custody of the two children Heather left behind, Braelyn, 8, and Tyler, 4, after Hardin's death. Heather agreed to the custody change.

"Heather was high when she signed the papers," Mickey Baltz said.

While Mickey Baltz, who is 58, and his wife, 50, were raising Heather's children, they also were visiting pawn shops to buy back the jewelry, the power washer and the iPad Heather sold to buy drugs. Her father was cruising neighborhoods where he thought Heather may be living.

Married for 29 years, the couple also held down full-time jobs. Mickey Baltz works as an auto body technician. His wife works as an administrative assistant for an insurance company.

Tina Baltz said she felt like she was watching the brown-haired, hazel-eyed sweet girl she raised simply disappear.

"The whole time I was thinking, will she ever be the same person again?" she said. "And I didn't think so and she wasn't."

"You see shows like 'Intervention' and we've watched them for years even before anything with Heather. And everyone starts out saying they were a happy child or a happy baby and then they go



Tina Baltz tries to comfort her grandson, 4-year-old Tyler Hardin, as he has a small meltdown during his birthday party at their home in Donelson on Nov. 11, 2017.

(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

into the bad stuff. Then you think why was everyone who was a happy child go into that problem.

"She was shy and she was a happy child. And then this happened."

Last year on Braelyn's birthday, Heather called to say she wanted to see her daughter. She told her parents to meet her outside the Family Dollar store on Whites Creek Pike. They met for a meal and then Heather left, walking west.

Mickey Baltz returned the next day, driving down the side street on which he thought he'd seen her, and noticed a house that was in the backdrop of a photograph Heather had texted him once before to prove to him she had not sold his car.

He called police. Heather had outstanding probation violations.

"I thought at least in jail she wouldn't be doing drugs, hopefully," he said. "When we saw her for Braelyn's birthday it was the worst I'd ever seen her. I'm thinking, 'Now I can relax. She's safe in jail.' "

In court for her hearing, "she cussed me as she walked out the door" as she was taken into custody, he said.



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Heather Baltz grabs daughter Braelyn Hardin for a kiss while the girl runs through the kitchen to play with a friend at their home in Donelson on Nov. 11, 2017.

(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

'I cannot regret anything I did'

Heather returned home in September, but did little to care for her children. She never gave them a bath. She lay on the couch much of the time.

"She'd been gone two years by then," Tina Baltz said. "I didn't push her to get up in the morning. I would get the kids up and feed them and take them to school. I wanted to give her time."

By January, Heather appeared ill. She had bronchitis-like symptoms, an ear infection, a sty in her eye and a large abscess on her back. A visit to the emergency room ended with her being sent home with a diagnosis of stress.

Eighteen days later, Heather was dead. Doctors at another hospital diagnosed a heart infection, most likely caused by intravenous drug use.

The last few weeks of Heather's life were filled with frustration. Her parents had spent years dealing with Heather's addiction.

"I got upset with her because she was just laying around," her father said. "I told her that if you don't do something you need to get out of my house."

"I cannot regret anything I did or said because it will ruin me," Tina Baltz said four months after her daughter's death. Then she closed her eyes and cried.



Mickey Baltz throws stones into the Cumberland River as grandchildren Braelyn and Tyler Hardin cheer as they visit Mickey's childhood home in Nashville on March 30, 2018.

Sunday would have been Heather's 29th birthday.

(Photo: Lacy Atkins / The Tennessean)

After church, the Baltzes plan to visit her grave with the children.

"I'm sure we'll maybe have some cake and ice cream with the kids so they can celebrate their mom's birthday," Mickey Baltz said.

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How big is the opioid problem in Nashville?

In 2016 there were 178 fatal overdoses attributed to opioids and 70 to heroin. Those statistics do not include deaths from drug-related complications or homicides and auto fatalities involving drugs.

Nashville paramedics are now administering more than 100 doses of the opioid overdose drug Narcan each week.

In September the Metro Health Department hired its first opioid response coordinator.

A needle exchange program was created to stem the risks associated with shared needles. And police, fire and emergency rooms are beginning to share data to get a handle on the epidemic.

But officials acknowledge they lag behind other major cities such as Columbus, Ohio, and Louisville, Kentucky, where the opioid crisis arrived sooner and is being addressed more aggressively.

The map below shows the number of EMS runs in response to non-fatal overdose emergency calls in Davidson County by ZIP code between March 2017 and March 2018. Click on an area to see the actual number of calls.

Source: Metro Public Health Department

How to get help

Need help for yourself or someone else dealing with addiction?

The Tennessee REDLINE (1-800-889-9789) is a toll-free information and referral line funded by the Tennessee Department of Mental Health Substance Abuse Services.

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